Focused Outreach

Section H

Introduction

Focused Outreach is another technology transfer strategy to develop mission related connections with industry. The ultimate objective is to lower the cost of war-fighter technology by increasing industrial base through multiple uses of the technology. Focusing on domestic industry segments, being sensitive to their technology needs and to the factors that impact those companies enhances the potential for creating a " technology pull" environment. Sometimes, a potential partner is readily identified. The researcher may have some very good ideas on where the technology can fill a special niche. Other times, technology assessments (refer to Section F) are needed to identify potential markets or the lack there of.

Description

Focused Outreach is an approach to seeking out those illusive needs. Consider the technical strengths and assets of the organization. Following are questions that will assist you in locating needs for your organization's technology. How mature is the technology? How much work is required to bridge the gap between your technology and the industrial application? What competing technology is already available? Which of your patents complement some of your other patents? An aggregation of patents can be an indicator of your organization areas of technical expertise. Are there broad domestic industry segments that may have needs synergistic to the organization's strengths? Can the technologies available for transfer be grouped into rough categories? Are there several general groupings that make sense? Depending on the nature of the organization's mission, the technology may have a very narrow application or a very pervasive one.

The best relationships have offsetting assets and needs. Ideally, industry sees a match between their needs and laboratory technology. The optimum relationship will promote the movement of technology between the laboratory and the company, when the technology of one matches the needs of the other, resulting in the desired technology "pull." Craftsmanship comes into play in nurturing those relationships.

Sources for Finding Offsetting Needs

When one or two focus areas for the organization become apparent, the question becomes "Where to find the offsetting technology needs?"

For a superior example of this approach, open the web site http://cosmos.ot.buffalo.edu/t2rerc. Click the "Programs and Projects" page. Their 5-step process starts with "Select the industry segment." Be creative in the categories. Once broad general categories have been selected where the organization's technology may have application, it is necessary to learn about those industry segments.

One tool deserving consideration is the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), a recent outgrowth (1994) of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC). Consult the laboratory technical librarian if you need help with the NAICS search.

NAICS is an industry classification system that groups establishments into industries based on the activities in which they are primarily engaged. A comprehensive system covering the entire field of economic activities, producing and nonproducing, there are 20 sectors or categories in NAICS and 1,170 industries listed in NAICS United States.

Another good source is the Federal Laboratory Consortium for Technology Transfer (FLC)

web site at www.federallabs.org. Open the categories in the FLC web site to see how other federal laboratories interact. Open the Law Enforcement section, for example, to see the current technology needs listed. The FLC has selected broad general industry segments that may fit the technology areas of the organization.

Agriculture and Food Processing
Assistive Technology
Automotive
Biotechnology & Medicine
Chemical
Computers/Software
Electronics
Energy (including natural gas and oil technologies)
Environmental
Law Enforcement
Manufacturing
Materials
Photonics
Sensors
Transportation

Using societies and organizations

Some technologies might be applicable in more than one focus area. What professional societies, trade associations or consortia serve their needs? Seek out these association web sites. A good site to check out is www.uscar.org and follow the Partnership for a New Generation of Vehicles (PNGV) path to the posted inventions needed.

Some trade associations, consortia and professional societies have journals or newsletters for their membership that might be receptive to a feature article on your technology. Some societies have committees that look for new and emerging technologies. An excellent example is the Civil Engineering Research Foundation site at www.cerf.org. If the technologies are relevant to the design and construction industry, follow the "Collaborative Programs". For a good listing of web sites for trade associations, go to www.InventorEd.org , use the site map and open "trade associations."

Some organizations develop lists of industry technology priorities. Use these lists to determine how your organization's available technologies stack up against those needs. Several organizations have exhibits or annual conferences. Some web sites, like the Assistive Technology Industry Association, www.atia.org will link directly to their members.

Some trade associations, consortia and professional societies have journals or newsletters for their membership that might be receptive to a feature article on your technology.

Subscribe to the trade journals that support your focus areas and read them. Consider submitting articles or abstracts on your technology.

Thoroughly research the companies that have market penetration in your focus areas. Learn where the focus industry segment goes to shop for technology. Be prepared when they contact your organization with a list of needs. Introduce yourself when attending technical conferences and be prepared to listen to company representatives as they list their corporate requirements. The objective here is to build a technical match between offsetting needs and resources.

Using State and Local Resources

Economic development organizations at the state and local level are excellent sources. Most economic development organizations have a good idea of local industry technology needs. Many industry segments rely on certain academic institutions with depth in their interest areas. Web site searches for those sectors are opportune in this case. A carefully constructed Education Partnership Agreement (EPA) or a three way Cooperative Research and Development Agreement CRADA could bring in graduate students doing their doctoral research on topics with true dual utility to the laboratory and to a company in the focus area. Some academic institutions will have centers that can be extremely useful to the technology transfer effort.

Use personal connections if they exist in your focus area. Network. Ask if the attributes of a

specific technology would be desirable in the application under consideration.

Consider the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program. Explore the potential for SBIR or Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) topics in technology areas that complement the focus area. When the desired relationship develops between the laboratory scientist and a company, a CRADA may be an appropriate vehicle to adapt the technology for industry application.

Various industry segments, like automotive, rely heavily on vendors and suppliers for new technologies. In such situations, the probability of a successful transfer is likely to be higher when working with several different tiers of the industry. Even though the companies in a focus group are a lot alike, they tend to consider themselves quite different from each other. It is important to be sensitive to this and to the "company proprietary" technology interest areas. Think of companies in the focus area collectively but treat them individually. Create an environment that fosters mission related movement of technology into and out of the laboratory.

Corporate ownership matters

There may be a foreign ownership issue with a company that is a really good candidate for the technology. If so, address it early to avoid embarrassing delays later. The process to work a CRADA with a foreign-owned company is in Section N in this handbook.